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U. S. Department of Agriculture

HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Monday, Sept. 14, 1931.

(NOT FOR PUBLICATION)

Subject: "How to Give an Old-Fashioned Barbecue." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U.S.D.A.

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Among the relics of old days that have been restored to popularity in recent times is an early type of picnic-called a barbecue- a big outdoor feast at which whole animals are roasted outdoors for hours and hours over a great bed of coals. The delicious odor of meat roasting, steaming coffee, and the smoke of a big wood fire tempt even the most civilized of us in those so-called civilized times. We're glad to go back and enjoy a primitive kind of feast every now and then. That's why the barbecue is such a favorite way to serve large groups of people. Granges, churches, community clubs and even schools have taken up this method of entertaining gatherings of several hundred people and they often use it as a money-raising benefit.

In the old days in the South whole pigs were roasted at barbecues. On the big ranches in the West, beef barbecues were often favorites. Frequently, beef, pork, lamb and chicken were barbecued all at the same feast. Even squirrels and rabbits are occasionally cooked this way.

This word barbecue-- nobody seems to be quite sure where it came from. Some authorities say it came from the Spanish. Perhaps this type of feast originally was an old Spanish custom. At all events, barbecues were widely used in the Southwest and in Mexico from early days to the present. A friend of mine who lived for many years in Mexico remembers attending them on Saints' day fiestas. There was usually a great barbecue, for example, on the day of San Juan in June and another at the fiesta of San Jeronimo in September.

Roasting these huge animals over the coals took ten or twelve hours, so it was the custom for the men to arrive the afternoon before the feast day, to dig the big trench for the fire, and prepare the meat which was to roast all night. Then they made a night of it. Gathered around to watch the roasting meat, they talked, sang and drank coffee from the great steaming pots until morning. In the morning the women and children arrived, bringing quantities of other food--bread, steaming vegetables, sauces and relishes, cakes, pies

and sweets. Feasting went on until night.

This old custom has spread throughout the country. I heard the other day of a man in North Carolina who has made a specialty of pork barbecues, and here's a side-light on the Menu Specialist's past. She tells me that she and her home economics girls used to help prepare the annual barbecue put on at the University of Arkansas. She says that both spring and fall are the good seasons to give one of these celebrations.

So, since this is September and since, in the last year or so we've had so many letters asking how to give a real, old-time barbecue, I've dedicated this day to telling you just how it is done, just how to cook the meat to hold in all the juices and natural flavor, just how to serve several hundred people to piping hot slices of meat in a very short time.

The first job for the barbecue artists, who go out the day before to start the meat cooking, is digging a fire trench. For beef this trench will be about 40 inches deep and 3 feet wide. Its length, of course, will depend entirely on the amount of meat to be cooked. A trench 10 feet long will accommodate 400 pounds of beef and a trench fifteen feet long will accommodate 600 pounds. If you are cooking pork, the barbecue expert down in South Carolina says the trench only needs to be 3 feet wide and 15 inches deep. And 4 feet in length should be allowed for each pig.

That's a lot of figures. The idea, as I understand it, is simply to have the trench the right size for the animal to be roasted. Space should be left around the edges of the trench wide enough for a man to walk. So when the trench is dug, the dirt should be thrown back out of the trench far enough to leave a pathway on all sides.

Next on the program is building a fire. Start it on the bottom of the trench with kindling. Gradually add larger pieces of wood and keep the fire burning as rapidly as possible until a bed of live coals 15 to 18 inches thick has accumulated in the bottom. Hard, dry wood--oak or hickory preferred--is recommended by most barbecue experts. The pieces of wood should not be too large since the roasting is all to be done over coals and every piece of wood must be thoroughly burned before the meat goes on. Big chunks should be broken up while they are burning. An iron rod with a hook at the end is a convenient utensil for breaking up the burning wood or for lifting out any pieces that are too big to break into coals. In about three hours the wood should be sufficiently burned to make a bed of coals. Even it off ready for the layer of sand over the top that will hold in the heat.

This sand layer should be about 1 and 1/2 inches thick and it should be clean, fairly coarse and dry. I have seen damp sand dried out ahead of time by spreading it on a piece of sheet iron over one end of the trench while the fire is burning. Then, it is not only dry but hot when it is time to cover the coals. The sooner the sand is put on the coals the longer the fire will stay hot.

At some barbecues, sand is not used. Wire netting or iron bars are spread over the coals and the carcasses laid on it, close together, with the meat side down. The meat is turned after two or three hours of cooking. During the cooking it is basted every now and then with a sauce of vinegar or cider, salt, pepper, butter and sometimes mustard to season it. A big wooden

stick wound at one end with clean cheese cloth is dipped in the sauce and brushed over the meat.

At other barbecues, especially beef barbecues, the meat is cut into chunks weighing about 20 pounds each, wrapped in two thicknesses of cheese-cloth and one thickness of clean burlap. As soon as the sand is put on the fire, the wrapped pieces of meat are put on the sand. Then immediately the trench is covered with pieces of sheet iron or boards, every crack sealed with either mud or sand so that none of the steam will escape.

With this method, it is not necessary to turn the meat or even look at it until it is time to serve it. About ten hours after it has gone in the trench, it will be ready to serve. Two, or three good carvers can carve the meat in thin slices as fast as it can be conveniently served. After carving, it may be salted to suit the taste.

The amount of meat ~~required~~ ~~naturally~~ depends on how big the servings are. A conservative estimate is 100 pounds of beef for 300 people. A more generous estimate is a pound of meat to a person.

The Menu Specialist has planned a barbecue menu for you today. She says it can be used on either a big or a small scale. If you want to roast a steak or even a chicken over hot coals in your backyard on one of these nice autumn evenings, this menu will do for a backyard barbecue. The pieces of hot juicy roast meat whether they are beef, pork or lamb are slipped into large, flat, round buns as soon as they are carved. So that's the first item on the menu- Hot barbecued sandiwches; next, Potato salad; Whole tomatoes; Relishes and sauces such as catsup, mustard, and pickles; Celery, and for dessert, Cake and Fruit or Pie, and coffee.

The recipe for today is for Cowboy Barbecue Sauce, this is the seasoning to use for basting meat while it is cooking over the coals.

1 quart of vinegar
 1 quart can of tomatoes
 3 tablespoons of red pepper
 2 or 3 hot pepper pods
 2 teaspoons of black pepper
 1 tablespoon of salt
 1/4 cup of sugar
 3 tablespoons of dry mustard
 1 tablespoon of whole cloves
 2 green peppers
 1/4 to 1/2 cup of bacon drippings, and
 2 onions, chopped and browned in the drippings
 That's a long list. I guess I better go over it again. (Repeat).

Boil all these ingredients together for 15 or 20 minutes--or until the flavors are well blended and spread the hot mixture on the meat, at intervals during the roasting.

This is enough for from 75 to 100 pounds of meat.

Tomorrow we're going to have a talk on 'Dustless Cleaning'.

